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XXV.—*On the Ethnology of Abyssinia and Adjacent Countries.*

By J. CRAWFURD, ESQ., F.R.S.

[Read Nov. 12, 1867.]

THE ethnology of so extensive a country as Abyssinia and its neighbourhood is a subject of deep interest, but one respecting which our knowledge is, for the present, very imperfect. To prepare the way, therefore, for a better acquaintance, I now lay before the society such part of a report lately submitted to Parliament as bears on the question. The report is that of Mr. Walter Plowden, and contains the best, the fullest, and the most recent account of Abyssinia that has come under my notice. Mr. Plowden, to judge by his writing, was a man of talent and education, as well as of keen observation. A young and enterprising officer of the Navy, he had first visited Bengal: fortune subsequently led him to Abyssinia, where he resided many years, becoming first a favourite with the then Ras, or governor of Amahara, and eventually with the adventurer who overthrew him, and who calls himself Theodorus, and aims at being the lawful hereditary Emperor, or Lord of Ethiopia. Mr. Plowden's report is dated in 1854, and shortly after he was waylaid and murdered by robbers or insurgents. After residing for many years in Abyssinia, he had been appointed her Majesty's Consul at Massowah, which is the seaport of a slip of Turkish territory on the shore of the Red Sea, and, of course, bordering on the eastern portion of the proper land of Abyssinia.

The following are such portions of Mr. Plowden's Report as directly or indirectly relate to Ethnology, and I shall follow them with a short comment:—

“Northern Abyssinia is a state isolated from the sea and from the civilised world by surrounding tribes of savages, and is fast lapsing from its former condition as a Christian realm, governed by one absolute sovereign, into subdivisions of small tribes, that will hereafter retain probably little of religion or civilisation.

“It is separated also from its kindred province of Shoa by strong and fierce races called Galla, who are independent, notwithstanding the boastful title of King of the Gallas assumed by Sahela Selassie and his successor, whose actual dominions do not equal a fifth part of the Galla territory.

“The country that I name Northern Abyssinia, and which is

inhabited by professing Christians, is about 400 miles in length from north to south, inclining westerly, and 300 in its greatest breadth, which is from north-north-west to south-south-east, that is, from the neighbourhood of Massowah to the town of Avjubay in Godjam, and from Wayhaynee, the limits of the Egyptian dominion in that quarter, to the borders of Effat, belonging to Shoa.

"Its north-western and western boundary is formed by the Pashalic of Sennaar; partly on the west and to the south-west vast forests, frequented by wild beasts, or hot plains inhabited by negro races, exclude Abyssinia from the navigable part of the Blue Nile. To the south, that river, an impetuous torrent, forms its boundary, almost its safety, from the Gallas—excellent horsemen, whose delight is war. To the east and south-east the Gallas of Borona, Wallo, Worahaimano, and Worrakallo, separate it from Shoa. The three last are the stronghold of Islamism; and these are again barred from the sea by the savage Adaiel, by whose hordes, led by Mahommed Grayne, Abyssinia was nearly destroyed, when saved by Portugal and the introduction of fire-arms. To the eastward again, more northerly, other tribes of Gallas called Areya and Azobo still interpose between Abyssinia and the sea-coast: and to the north-east and north various tribes with various tongues, Taltals, Danakil, Shihos, Hababs, &c., everywhere seclude that realm and join the dominions of Abbas Pasha, in the tribes of the Beni-Ameer, ruled by the Pasha of Taka. A circle is thus completed that must somewhere be broken through, either by the Abyssinians themselves, had they the power, or by that nation desiring a free intercourse with them.

"The tribes I have last mentioned, that seclude Abyssinia from the Red Sea, occupy a strip of land along its coast of 70 to 100 miles in breadth; and it is here that the Turkish Government has occupied several points, of which mention shall be made hereafter: and although these tribes were formerly Abyssinians, and still, in many places, as at Massowah, speak the ancient Ethiopic tongue, as they are now completely separated, I shall not include them in an account of Christian Abyssinia in its present limits.

"Setting aside, therefore, this border along the sea, Abyssinia is a range of vast table-lands and fantastic mountains, alternating and varying in elevation from 4,000 to 14,000 feet above the sea level. Deep valleys, the beds of the larger rivers, intersect this in various directions, but these streams, however circuitous their course, almost all finally join the Blue Nile, or Abäi, as it is termed by the Abyssinians. These are nowhere navigable, and a few mountain torrents only, and

when swollen by the rains, find their way to the Red Sea. The abrupt and high ranges from which these torrents descend are seen from the coast at the distance of 80 miles inland, and mark everywhere, as far north as the 16th degree of latitude, the confines of the Christian country.

“The climate, on all the highland, is salubrious: but the valleys, at certain seasons, are rendered dangerous by fevers, particularly the low countries bordering on Sennaar, and these valleys produce the richest crops of grain. The tropical rains fall plentifully at the same season with those of Bengal, from June to September, and the soil, extremely fertile, might, from the variety of temperature at the different elevations, produce almost every article of human consumption. Two large inland lakes exist; the one near Gondar, called Tana, the other, in the province of Tehluderree, called Haik. The former is 60 miles in length, studded with islands, and abounds in excellent fish; singular to say the crocodile, that is found in most of the large rivers of Abyssinia, does not infest this lake, which swarms however with hippopotami. The Blue Nile takes its rise a short distance from this, and after forcing its way through the waters of the lake at one corner, forms nearly a circle round Godjam, the southern province of this country.

“The flat and overflowed lands round the Lake Tana, are kept as pasture for cattle, or partially sown with grain; but they are well adapted for the cultivation of rice, or sugar-canes, which both grow wild; or of indigo, which has thriven in Shaa.

“The cold plains of Waggera and Godjam, and the lofty mountains of Semen, where the blackberry, the hawthorn, and the fir, now usurp great part of the soil, are fitted for all the productions of northern latitudes. The more temperate provinces would probably be favourable to the growth of pepper, spices, and coffee, which last has already been planted at Korata; and even the coast, and hottest districts, might give crops of cotton of fine quality. Barley, wheat, peas, grain, beans, maize, Indian corn, millet, linseed, saffron, oats, and some kinds of grain unknown to us, are cultivated with little trouble; a small oblong potatoe, called “dennich,” and the root of a very nourishing banana, the “ansett,” form a great part of the food of some districts.

“In the present confusion and supineness not a fiftieth part of the surface is, I suppose, cultivated; while such is the bounty of Nature that Edjow, and other provinces, produce two crops per annum on the same ground.

“Fruit-trees, the plum, the orange, the lemon, and the peach, grow wild in the jungle; the vines are luxuriant, and

the quality of the wine excellent; numerous streams everywhere irrigate and adorn this agreeable land, whose rich meadows, lowing herds, sparkling waters, golden harvest, and shady trees, often present a scene of European beauty to the traveller.

“Gold and copper exist, and iron is found in great abundance; plains of sulphur and various salts, in the province now occupied by the Taltals, supply all Abyssinia with those commodities; and other wealth may lie hid in that volcanic tract. A search for coal would, elsewhere, be probably successful; but to describe the mineral and natural riches of this country should be the task of one better qualified for the investigation.

“It is a country that combines mineral resources, a delightful climate, and tropical luxuriance, with so much general salubrity, that no waste of European life need be apprehended from frequenting it.

“The temperature of the moderate elevations is very regular, in some places scarcely varying ten degrees throughout the year. Mineral and hot springs abound. All the colder provinces, particularly the Galla, are favourable to horse-breeding; sheep, goats, and cattle, thrive throughout the country; the mulberry has been grown; the potatoe, lately introduced, flourishes; the food is, in general, found too abundantly, as it is found almost without labour.

“But while nature has done so much, human energy, or skill, has done nothing. The utter want of roads and bridges—the stagnant, or lawless, nature of the social system—the obstinate attachment to ancient customs—the multitude of rulers, indifferent to everything but their personal enjoyment—the constant wars, and consequent insecurity of life and property—are fast ruining a country of whose beauty and fertility its inhabitants may, with some reason, boast.

“The divisions of language in Christian Abyssinia are two, Teegré and Amharic. The former, a slight corruption from the ancient Geez, itself derived from Hebrew and Arabic, and the latter, in my opinion, a distinct language, into which have crept many words from the former. The Amharic is now the written language of the country, the Geez character being used, with some additions. The Teegré dialect is spoken in the province of Teegré, bounded by the River Takazzee, flowing from the south-south-east to north-north-west, and with some variations all along the sea-coast from Massowah, inclusive, to the port of Aggeek—the Amharic, by the rest of Abyssinia, from the Takazzee to the Abäi: and also in the province of Shoa. In Teegré I include the tribe called Agow, that inhabit a district at the source of the Takazzee, anciently called the

Kingdom of Lasta, whose origin I cannot divine, and whose language is totally different; and in the Amhara, the Agows of Damot, whose language is half Galla.

“The manners of the Amhara are pleasing: their features are generally of the European or Asiatic, that is, Arab cast, and they are remarkably quick and intelligent. Their standard of morality is very low: sensual pleasures, as intoxication, are gratified without scruple and without shame: in general the interests or convenience of the moment are the only rule of conduct; want of tact and ill-temper the only crimes in the Amhara code. Two phrases in the Christian doctrine that suit his careless temper are much insisted on, ‘that this world is fleeting and valueless,’ and ‘that the indulgence of the Creator is infinite,’ the one to justify his insouciance, the other as removing all check to his follies and enjoyments. Crimes are seldom committed wantonly, but all considerations yield generally to those of interest, whether in prince or people. They have a great contempt for other nations, and scarcely know, or do not care, if any exist or not; the tribes on their borders they regard as created for the breathing fields of Abyssinian valour; hardly believing that the rain falls, or the sun shines, on other lands, they are persuaded that the world beyond the sea is a succession of barren deserts. The most common question to a European is whether corn grows in his country, and sometimes whether there are women; yet they are manly, generous, usually humane and indulgent, always polite, and seldom coarse. I attribute their faults to ignorance, their virtues to a kindly nature. Except tillage of the ground their pride renders them adverse to labour; but the women are exceedingly industrious.

“The people of Teegré are somewhat different in character; with more of the obstinacy of their Jewish blood they are ruder and vainer than the Amhara, noisy, talkative, and quarrelsome. Though nearer the sea, they are even more ignorant of other nations; they despise all the human race but themselves, and generally each man, all existing but himself. On the whole, I think them inferior to the Amhara, but they are more laborious, and more trustworthy individually, though politically treacherous.

“The Agows have a peculiar character as well as language; they are sterner, harsher, and more resolute than the other Abyssinians, and are proverbial for dissimulation and hardness of heart, as well as extreme selfishness. They permit no interference of the other races in their government or internal policy and laws. They all speak the Teegré and Amharic as well as their own language. They are always governed by a

chief of their own race, whose laws, though severe on themselves, are just, and even encouraging, towards strangers. They acknowledge, as feudal superior, the Ras of Begemder, since the fall of the Emperors of Gondar.

“The inhabitants of each province in Abyssinia have some peculiar traits; as Godjam and Kalagoozia are famous for union, Teegré Central for the contrary; some are warlike, some cowardly, some faithful, and some treacherous, and so on. In some respects they are a happy people. They possess in their own land all the necessaries and many of the luxuries of life in profusion; they have great freedom of speech and action, and are always gay, systematically, as by constitution. Their conversation, often sensible, is always witty. A practical philosophy leads them to prefer laughter to tears; the tragedy and comedy of life are received alike with indifference or a joke. Misfortunes and death are generally met with fortitude. It is hard to convince them that they will benefit either by our science or our wealth.

“The most curious point in their character is this, that no one is expected to feel ashamed of any crime or vice; and whereas in other countries men in committing serious crimes are morbidly excited, in Abyssinia they are perpetrated with indifference, and generally recounted, sometimes by the individual himself, certainly by others, with gaiety and laughter. In the same way, females are rarely gross or immodest outwardly, seeing that they need in no way be ashamed of the freest intercourse with the other sex. I have never yet been able to discover what an Abyssinian could be ashamed of, except a solecism in what he considers good manners, or the neglect of some superstitious form of social observance. They are peculiarly sensitive, however, to ridicule and abuse, whether true or untrue, and half the time of an Abyssinian master is passed in deciding disputes on such subjects. Some traits, though apparently of slight consequence, are often very irksome to a stranger; for instance, every man above the lowest rank has a door-keeper, whose duty it is to examine who should be admitted, and when. The insolence of this officer rises in proportion to the rank of his master. The primitive ante-chamber is a court in the open air, without seats, often muddy, always filthy; and as the porter will contrive to keep you waiting, even against his master's orders, this system is most disagreeable to an European. Further, you wait amongst a crowd, and it is pointed out to you that the brothers or sons of the King are there in the same position.

“Sometimes the order comes to clear the court, when sticks are used without distinction of persons. The chiefs affect a

trifling and childish manner, to the great annoyance of a white man, who has, perhaps, some important affairs to speak on, and who, from his more energetic feelings, thinks them of greater importance than they are. I will not dwell on these matters, but the difficulties they raise are not trifling, nor easy to vanquish.

“The Abyssinians are superstitious; they believe in the efficacy of amulets, of writings in jargon mixed with Scripture; in the charms of Mussulmans to control the hail and the rain; in spirits of the forest and the river; in omens, in fortune-tellers; and in devils that may be cast out by spells from their human victim, quoting the authority of the New Testament for their belief: to these they attribute epilepsy and other incurable diseases.

“One absurdity has, however, led to the death of many innocent individuals: all workers in iron, and some others, are supposed to convert themselves into hyænas, and to prey invisibly on their enemies, and many have been slaughtered in this belief. It is not worth while to enter upon a full account of this singular idea, which is universal and tenacious, and has its parallel in the ‘loup-garou’ of France, and the ‘wehr-wolf’ of Germany.

“Gambling appears to be unknown, but they are constantly betting, not, however, to gain money, as the judge of the forfeit receives it from the loser, the winner having thus punished his adversary. This is a fruitful source of revenue to the chiefs. In their houses they are dirty, and generally in their domestic habits, though cleanly in person when their means will permit.

“Save the door-keeping I have mentioned, much freedom exists in their society: in one room a beggar jostles a chief, and a dirty rag presses against the white turban of a priest; or a thief, perhaps in chains, is seated next to an honest man. Nay, the latter will make way for the former with much politeness if an older man than himself. So indulgent are they, that even a madman is never put under restraint and rarely excluded, though perhaps dangerous. Visiting is unceasing amongst the middle classes, and hospitality is offered with indiscriminate profusion according to the means of the proprietor.

“In Abyssinian society no repugnance is even shown to those afflicted with apparent and loathsome disease, and no man forfeits his position by any crime. Theft is in many provinces regarded as an honourable employment; highway robbery as quite excusable, even if accompanied by homicide; rape is venial; and adultery regards only the husband. This

has probably been the national character for many ages, and now that misrule and anarchy are superadded, the Abyssinians are unconsciously retrograding to a savage state, and losing all the advantages they may have acquired from the adoption of Christianity. Yet they still nourish the delusion that they are a nation, as when their kings marched armies into the Holy Land and governed Arabia, while their fleets traded to India, and their African dominions were bounded by the White Nile, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

“They have in general an aversion to change in their religious observances, laws, and customs: their ancient laws are, however, nearly forgotten, and their manners are changing yearly. This, which is characteristic of the race, is a great obstacle to improvement. Neither the idea of progress nor the word exists; for all absurdities and abuses, even for injustice, the reason ‘it has always been so’ is held sufficient even when the error is admitted. In consequence, as nothing can be stationary, their whole institutions are degenerating.

“They are very quick of apprehension and subtle of speech, and as from childhood they are accustomed to select phrases that may be agreeable to the person they are addressing or useful to themselves, are always specious and sometimes eloquent. It is very difficult for a stranger to arrive at the truth by questions.

“They are fond of litigation, and most of them skilled in the quibbles and proverbs that are essential to success in any dispute. It is the favourite sport of boys and children, and the smallest difference of opinion furnishes matter for a long and sometimes expensive lawsuit. The obstinacy in trifles is a mark perhaps of their Jewish blood. Notwithstanding the abundance of food in Abyssinia, nothing is more difficult or occupies more time than to provide for the daily wants of an establishment. A chief can obtain anything at once, and often without payment, where a stranger infinitely richer would, without his friendship and assistance, run the risk of starving. Nothing can be obtained by money except at a market, and often at a very great distance. Shops are unknown, and almost all trades must be practised in each household. Water must be carried for household purposes from a distant brook, corn must be converted into flour, cookery must be prepared, bread baked, and beer brewed, in every establishment according to its numbers, and to no office of domestic utility will a man put his hand for any amount of hire. On a journey where no markets can be found all necessaries must be carried at least to the next large town, involving a very inconvenient amount of baggage. The Abyssinians, indeed, demand hospi-

tality at each village, and take up their quarters without ceremony, often having to fight for the accommodation.

“The personal baggage of a merchant is equal in bulk to his goods. In more dangerous times, when baggage is a serious impediment, this billeting system becomes an imperative necessity for all travellers. On a campaign, the country people having fled from their homes on the approach of an army, money is entirely useless, and the King must either supply the stranger in his camp, which he cannot always do, or the latter has the alternatives of starvation and foraging. Grass is abundant in the country; but some local potentate or band of villagers must in general be propitiated before beasts are allowed to feed, and this cannot always be done by money; nor is the European character usually disposed to the other resource of flattery. An irritable man should not visit Abyssinia.

“The greater part of the time of all classes is occupied in eating and drinking. The instant any guest is received, no matter at what hour, he must be fed, and is not allowed to refuse; meat is always produced, or beer, for they love not dry talking, be it at daylight or at midnight. The profusion at their meals, and the large number of retainers and daily guests that are fed by men of rank and wealth, bear a resemblance to the customs of our Saxon ancestors. The parallel may perhaps hold good in other points. The gates are open in the evening to all who demand food and shelter in the name of friendship or religion; rich and poor are seated at one table; in the house of a great chief public singers chant the legends of their heroes, or receive guerdon for reciting impromptu stanzas in praise of their host and his guests; nor does the frequent intoxication weaken the likeness. Feasts are instituted a certain number of days after death, being a point of honour with the relatives of the deceased, and encouraged by the priests, who are guests by privilege, and who live principally by these general banquets. Numerous oxen are slaughtered, and for two or three days the streets reel with drunkenness, the white turbans of the pastors being conspicuous. The rejoicings at each wedding furnish equally good cheer; and as it is not difficult to obtain admission, these festivities are a great resource to the scribes and all the poorer classes. I believe the truth of the remark made to me by an Abyssinian who had visited Rome, ‘that while the rich in Europe could live more luxuriously, there was no country like Abyssinia for the poor; but he did not perceive that this arose from the scantiness of population, the richness of the soil, and the smallness of towns.

“ From constant exercise, the Abyssinians have great powers of memory : though a written language exists, they seldom hold correspondence, and when a letter is written it is never signed, sealed, or dated ; yet easy as a forgery would be, I have never heard of an instance. All affairs are conducted verbally ; and at a distance by messengers. These messages are usually delivered with fidelity, and the character of the herald is considered sacred.

“ In the relations of parent and child the Abyssinians are kind and indulgent. The children are obliged by law to share their means with their aged parents, and generally do so voluntarily. No distinction is made between legitimate and illegitimate children, and all share alike on the decease of their father. Marriage is a civil contract between the parties, dissolved at pleasure, and it is usual in old age only to take the sacrament together in the church, thereby pledging themselves to fidelity and monogamy. The people of Teegré are less lax than the Amharas, amongst whom women are regarded as toys, without the trouble of secluding them in a harem.

“ Friendship is measured by gifts. Each chief begs from his compeer : nay, from his own dependant. Nothing will so much strike a stranger in Abyssinia as their custom of asking without reserve—without shame, for anything they may fancy. They are, however, ready to make compensation ; they may be offended at a refusal of their request, but equally so, if the return be not accepted. They cannot imagine that this is not the custom all over the world. If an Abyssinian returns a gift and says, ‘I require nothing but your friendship,’ the phrase is studiously polite, and means your gift is not of sufficient value. They treat all strangers in the same way. The chiefs beg without ceremony, but in return bestow their friendship, which is necessary, and sometimes more than the value of the gift in their country produce. To specify the minutiae of this custom, practised by high and low, rich and poor, would be fatiguing. An embassy to or from a foreign prince, is a mere calculation of value exchanged. The poor make presents to the rich and powerful, and receive ten times their cost in return, protesting, however, that nothing is further from their desire ; nay, so organised is this custom, that if a person bestows a gift on one of equal rank, and does not receive an adequate compensation, he can bring an action against him as though for debt, and will receive damages by law. This is the favourite manner in which they attack the purse of an European, and is a pretty and ingenious way to avoid direct begging. An European envoy to this country must, in the present state of society, exchange presents with the great

chiefs, or be regarded as an object of charity, and it must be done with tact to avoid the imputation of timidity or folly.

“The ties of relationship are strong, from mutual interest, as a barrier to the exactions of rapacious governors and the violence of the soldiery. They count kin to the fiftieth cousinship, and a man with many relatives has much influence. The military governor is constantly changed, but such a man retains a kind of hereditary power. They do not carry their union to the point of sharing their purse: on the contrary, incessant lawsuits are carried on between the nearest relations for land and property; but in moments of danger they stand by each other like a Highland clan. They muster in thousands to bewail one to whom they refused a loaf while living, and they all unite to avenge his death by violence.

“They retain two institutions of Judaism, and cling to them with obstinacy. The Saturday in Godjam is held of equal sanctity with the Sunday, so that water cannot be drawn, nor wood hewn, from Friday evening to Monday morning. Moreover, many animals are considered unclean, as the hare, the goose, in some districts the wild boar, and some other animals. There are numberless saints’ days in the year, on which no work is done; and in the towns they will not even suffer others to work, which is most irksome to the traveller.

“As a nation they have never had any element of progress within themselves, nor do they appear ever to have wished for it. Coinage, and architecture in solid masonry, have never been attempted, though the Ptolemies set them the example of both, as shown by the remains of Axum, and the gold and copper coins found in those ruins to this day. The Portuguese introduced the art of brick-burning, and built towers and bridges of excellent workmanship; no person in Abyssinia can now make mortar. No purely national antiquities of any kind exist. Their kings and their people two thousand years ago, must have passed their lives as now, seeking only for daily splendour or enjoyment and indifferent to the perpetuation of their memory by any monument.

“Though difficult to persuade, no people would be more docile under slight coercion. As soon as a chief of firmness governs in any district, quiet and order prevail to a surprising extent without any police. The word of the chief suffices to produce this tranquillity; but it cannot last long, as on his death or removal, the means of disorder are unfortunately in every hand. To a foreign conquest little resistance would be offered; they are too imaginative to dream of patriotism; yet had they any national spirit, the rugged nature of their mountain passes would offer many difficulties to an invading army.

This spirit, which is entirely wanting, was supplied in their contests with the Mahomedans by fanatical excitement, and in warring with neighbouring barbarians, by the hopes of plunder.

“Individually they are brave; but in masses, being without discipline, are hesitating, and little to be feared. Having no coinage of their own, the only money that passes current in Abyssinia is the German crown of Maria Theresa. This is changed, in Teegré, into pieces of cloth of various lengths, fabricated from cotton of the country or of India: and in the Amhara into blocks of salt, which vary in number at each market-place. This salt is cut in the plains of the Taltal, near the Red Sea, and transported far into the interior. It becomes very valuable in the Galla provinces, where eight small pieces are sometimes exchanged for a dollar, and a hundred will purchase a slave. Gold, which under their Emperors was used as a currency, by weight, and was abundant, according to tradition, has now almost disappeared. The Ruler of Shoa sent some pounds of fine gold to the Court of Gondar, moulded in the shape of a mule, in token of fealty. The custom was continued till the last forty years.

“The whole dress of the people is of white cotton cloths, spun and wove in the country, nor do they consider a foreigner as dressed at all unless he throws one of their white mantles over his own apparel. It illustrates curiously the character of this nation, so vain and stubborn in trifles, to see the servants of even a well-dressed European follow him almost with shame, and the rest of the populace regarding him with laughter or sneers, nor is this a small matter nor a trifling difficulty. The first impression does much, and ridicule is harder to vanquish than persecution. Socrates, in our modern attire, would scarcely be respected in Abyssinia.

“There are no castes in Abyssinia, but the people may be divided into four classes—military, sacerdotal, agricultural, and mercantile; the number that cannot be included in these is insignificant—a few workmen, as tanners, saddlers, and blacksmiths, disproportioned even to the wants of the community, and some idlers who live by the produce of their farms.

“The great chiefs have generally much dignity of manner, and some of them might be models of tact and polite suavity, particularly those who have any pride of ancestry; but engrossed with the sensual pleasures afforded by their wealth and power, and uncertain how long they may enjoy them, they never dream of improving the condition of their subjects, though often just and indulgent in their rule, as far as the paramount necessity of conciliating their armies will permit.

“The cultivators of the soil—the small farmers and peasantry

—though struggling with many difficulties, form a numerous class. In spite of bad government, military oppression, and the constant devastations of war, they bear directly or indirectly the whole burden of taxation and the large standing armies. Though seldom wealthy, they are rarely in distress, and appear attached to their way of life. Soldiery are constantly quartered on them, except in some districts that always turn out *en masse* to resist, and where the troops dare not venture.

“Villages may be seen everywhere in Abyssinia, perched on hills, hidden in most inconvenient hollows, and far from water. There are two good reasons for this: in the valleys the borders of the streams are infected with malaria; and on the plain, if they are too easy of access, they are nightly infested by crowds who demand or exact hospitality. On any frequented high road many a ruined hamlet may be seen, deserted by its inhabitants on this account.

“Though the feudal power of the military chiefs is so great, it may be doubted if the influence of the priesthood be not more important. That body holds in chains the mind of the people, moulds at will customs, morals, and all the social ties, which have consequently remained almost unchanged, amidst the change of dynasties, the ruinous shocks of international war, and the gradual crumbling away of a wide and Christian Empire.

“The spirit of Protestantism, or free inquiry, is not more welcome in Abyssinia than in other primitive churches; but from the less eager spirit of its people, it has not been found necessary to check it by any penalties. Going to the fountain-head they teach but one book to the children of the laity, ‘The Psalms of David,’ and, without forbidding other learning, discourage it, confining it as much as possible to the clergy and the scribes. Their great numbers, the almost superstitious reverence of the multitude, and the practice of confession and absolution, have enabled the priests to pursue this system with success. All the larger towns are entirely under their control, and being cities of refuge, sacred even from the Ras, are filled with dissolute and dangerous characters. This institution is probably a remnant of their Mosaic law, and gives them great power over the bodies, as the ceremony of confession, and the dreadful thunder of excommunication, do over the imagination, of an ignorant race.

“The Christianity professed and taught in Abyssinia is much materialised. The religion that is elsewhere the companion of progress, is here made the stumbling-block to improvement; stress, for the most part, being only laid on its

ceremonies, and many being added that in no way belong to it. Though they detest the Church of Rome, and indeed despise all save their own, quarrelling even with the Alexandrian from which they receive their Aboona, or high Priest, through their love of contradiction, they may be thought to have taken some good lessons from the former, on the means of retaining the population in blind submission.

“All church service is conducted in the Geez tongue, unknown save to the learned. The Psalms are also in that language, and the pupil, while encouraged to read them, is persuaded that he should not seek to understand them, but that he fulfils a high duty by gabbling over a number of them daily. No one save the priest himself is ever instructed in the Gospel in any tongue. Great adoration is paid to the Virgin Mary, and to numberless saints and angels. Their churches are filled with pictures, to which, when unveiled, the multitude bows with reverence. Fasting is rigidly insisted on, sometimes however compounded for by money. These fasts embrace nearly two-thirds of the year, and most of those who keep them are convinced that they will be weighed against their sins, though this doctrine is not officially taught. So much do they attach importance to this and other outward forms, that a man of ‘Hamazayn’ will slay his near relative, and return home calmly, but will be horror-stricken should his wife have ground flour on a saint’s day, or prepared his meal before the hours of fasting have expired.

“The churches are very numerous, and each church is itself an object of devotion, as it is firmly believed that the saint whose name it bears, actually resides in its sanctuary. The stones are kissed with awe, and offerings are deposited, which the priest receives; vows are registered and prayers are made, with equal fervour to the Virgin, our Saviour, or some traditional martyr of the Abyssinian church, from which they expect immediate benefit in this world as well as salvation in the next. Miracles, I need scarcely say, are not unfrequent, and certain spots of peculiar sanctity perform them almost daily. Whenever offerings slacken, and the numbers that kneel at the shrine decrease, a picture rolls its eyes, a leper is cleansed, or the blind are restored to sight.

“Great respect is paid to all who wear the white turban, the mark of priesthood; they are always addressed as ‘father,’ and as superiors in the second person plural, even by chiefs of the highest rank. Any person dying without having chosen a father confessor, is denied Christian burial, and so jealous are the priests of this great means of power, that they extend the rule to strangers. The confessors of the great men are usually

indulgent, and they are permitted to compound for their frailties by the endowing of a new church, or handsome gifts to an old one. Nor are monasteries wanting to complete the resemblance to the Roman Catholic Church, and to the middle ages, where every immorality is practised; nor solitary hermits who dwell in gloomy forests, feeding on roots, and exposed to ferocious animals, and who are sometimes as sincere as they are useless. Nunneries alone are absent from the picture, though vows of celibacy are sometimes taken, if rarely kept, save at an advanced age.

“Christianity is reduced to the simple form of obedience to the priest. The Gospel is forbidden in our translations into the modern Amharic tongue, nor is there one man in ten thousand who knows the commonest precepts of his religion. If some few moral ideas are not denied, they are never inculcated or insisted on, and absolution can always be obtained for money. So blindly devoted is the Abyssinian laity to these astute fathers, that even the almost daily spectacle of their drunkenness, excesses, and immorality, nay, the knowledge that the confessional means ‘seduction made easy,’ excites no feeling of disgust and astonishment.

“Thus it is not wonderful, if lying, illegitimate sexual intercourse, intoxication, or manslaughter, are regarded as venial—things that might be considered curious as the daily occupation of professing Christians, were it not for the ignorance in which they are studiously retained under meshes too cunningly woven to be burst by any efforts of their own. Their present immorality does not argue a bad nature in the Abyssinian; on the contrary, I am astonished that good and moral men are still found: and it is certain that Christianity, even thus debased, has hitherto saved them from the wantonness of crime and excess of cruelty that stains the records of almost all African races, and of some in other quarters of the globe. It is necessary for the stranger in Abyssinia to propitiate the church, or at least to be very careful how he attacks it in his conversation. Should an outcry be raised on such points as his want of respect for the priests, his not fasting, his eating with Mahomedans, which is regarded with horror, or the like, he will find it difficult to resist the storm, though the Abyssinian persecutor is generally content with banishment. It was by these means that the English Protestant Mission was unceremoniously ejected, when it was found that it was introducing the New Testament to notice in the Amhara language, and announcing truths dangerous to priestcraft.

“One-third of the lands was originally set apart for the church, but this portion is now much reduced, though its

share is still large. The native head of the Abyssinian church is called the 'Tchegee,' and resides at Gondar, his house being a place of peculiar sanctity; but the bishop, called 'Aboona,' who receives a reverence almost amounting to worship, is always a Copt. He is sent by the Patriarch of Alexandria on consideration of some thousand dollars collected and forwarded by the Abyssinians for his journey. The present Aboona is said to be the one hundred and eighteenth, and is named Salama. His chief residence should also be at Gondar, but there have been fierce disputes in the Abyssinian Church, and the gifts of Sahela Selassie, of Shoa, prevailed on the Ras Ali to banish the Aboona, who has since been living near Adowah, where he has still large possessions. All churches must be consecrated, all priests and deacons ordained by him; crowds of pilgrims are always waiting in his courts, sometimes intermixed with men of rank, some to obtain a blessing or to be absolved from deadly sin, a great number to be made deacons. Worn with a journey of perhaps months, priests are there in flaunting red garments, carrying a mysterious box, wherein is kept the 'Holy of Holies' of each church, like the ark of the covenant—waiting for the blessing of the Aboona, which is equivalent to the consecration of that church. His sentence of excommunication is much dreaded, and he has great influence in all the political or warlike movements in the country. His residence is an inviolable sanctuary.

"From time to time the Church of Rome has made great efforts to induce the Abyssinians to recognise the Pope of Rome as their spiritual head. The Jesuits at one time having nearly succeeded, and having lighted up the flames of civil war in the time of the Emperor Socinios, failed at last, and were massacred or banished. At this time the struggle is renewed by several missions under three bishops to gain a footing in this territory. The Aboona by interdict, and when that fails by inducing the chief to expel these intruders, carries on a war with them with various success; for, as to his prestige, they oppose money. These missions are under the protection of France.

"Even the Aboona, influential as he is, finds it difficult to assert his authority over the banded priests when they differ on any doctrinal point; nor dares he announce a truth that may oppose any strong national prejudice. Should he say that a Christian is permitted to eat what he pleases, he would raise a storm from which his sacred character would scarcely protect him. Priests are permitted to marry one wife, but not a second time, except the Aboona and Tchegee, who should lead a life of rigid celibacy.

"The only interference of the chiefs in church government is

in the appointment of a civil officer in each town, who settles all disputes, orders church ceremonials, and receives large profits. He must have some learning, and is called "Alika".

"The priests have no pay, but the profits on the land attached to each church are divided in proportion to their several dignities. Then the father confessors extract what they can, according to the wealth of their patients; the pious bestow rich offerings for their spiritual welfare, and the laity are mulcted on the occasions of births, christenings, marriages, deaths, registers of sale and purchase, burials, and the like; so that besides their continual feasting at the public expense, they are usually well-stocked with money, and from their numbers have been compared by the Abyssinians to locusts.

"It is just, however, to say that they have preserved the Christian faith, impure indeed, but still alive, in the midst of foreign invasion, domestic degradation, and the extinction of Government, and that it is under their protection that agriculture flourishes and villages are built where deserts would else be seen. What learning exists has also been preserved by them from utter extinction. But as they become themselves daily more corrupt, society more disorganised, and the law more inefficient, church and people will be lost in utter barbarism, unless Providence have preserved those embers of civilisation to be cherished into life by some more generous and powerful nation.

"Their learning is limited almost to the books of the Old and New Testament, into which some are admitted that we consider apocryphal; besides these there are some monkish legends, a code of laws, and the chronicles of their kings, containing in a mass of rubbish a few sentences worthy of notice. All these books, written by monks with much labour, were formerly eagerly sought for, but are now neglected, almost forgotten. That art of painting is nearly lost; and ornamental missals may now be found very cheap, as there are scarcely any purchasers; the number of persons that can read and write is diminishing daily, and the code of laws is becoming a mystery to the most learned. There are about four hundred works in the country, of which eighty-one for the Bible.

"Numbers of Abyssinian priests and monks visit Jerusalem yearly, and it may be deemed singular that these, receiving much kindness at the hands of Europeans, do not awaken their countrymen to some knowledge of the world beyond, and some better feeling towards their fellow Christians than contempt or indifference.

"Scribes or 'deftaras' are often more learned than the prests, and equally take advantage of the general ignorance.

Their principal gain is by writing amulets, and charms against every disease, almost against death. It is believed that some of these men, by their spells, can invoke demons and spirits from the waters, they being careful to nourish the delusion by juggling exhibitions from time to time. They also profess medicine, and as they do not much analyse the effects of their drugs, many an unfortunate falls a victim to some poisonous plant administered as a love philtre. Most of them are hangers-on of the different churches; they are generally cunning, debauched, and mischief-makers.

"Jews are still found in some numbers, and though despised are not persecuted; this may be owing to their poverty. They know nothing of the Hebrew tongue; but some read the Mosaic books in the Geez, and are as scrupulous in their ceremonials as their brethren elsewhere. They are the best masons in the country. They have no peculiar physiognomy.

"The Koomants, found only in the neighbourhood of Gondar, are acknowledged by neither Christian, Mussulman, nor Jew, and have a bastard creed, a compound of all three. They are skilful carpenters, and supply all Gondar with wood. They are despised, but being very courageous, and having lately shown an inclining towards Christianity, it is not improbable that their distinctions will soon disappear, many even now have ceased a practice which was the chief separating cause. They hung heavy weights in the lobe of the ear of the girls, who were thereby excluded from any chance of marriage with Christians.

"The 'Wytos' are a small class, who live by hunting the hippopotamus; they eat the flesh, and sell the hide and teeth. They call themselves Mahomedans, but are not recognised by the other followers of that creed. They principally reside near the Lake Tānā, and are a very handsome race. They are regarded with as much aversion as the Jews. But all these classes are permitted the free exercise of their own religious faith.

"There are many Mahomedans in Abyssinia, and in all large towns they have a separate quarter, with mosques and public prayers. From the advantage that their commerce in slaves gives them over their Christian competitors, the Mussulman traders are the most wealthy, and are, therefore, generally appointed to the high post of Negadeh Ras, or collector of all customs, literally 'head of merchants.' To enforce their authority these keep large bodies of armed men, and confidently predict the final triumph of the faith of the Prophet in Abyssinia. The Abyssinian Mussulmans, as distinguished from the Galla, are all traders; they will not eat meat killed by Christians,

and are frequently their superiors in morality and intelligence. They live on terms of equality, good humour, and friendship with the Christians, openly defend their creed, and receive any proselyte that offers, and do not appear to think that the restrictions of the Koran respecting strong drinks apply to them at all. Mahomedans and Christians do not intermarry. One cannot but admire the toleration of this people, though it does not extend to other Christians; however, no one can be molested on account of his opinions, and a small concession will always mollify the church. There is no distinction in dress between those who profess different creeds, and are all subject to the same law.

“The Mahomedans, like the Christians, do not in general seclude their women; and the latter maintain in general the important privilege of displaying their charms. This formerly was done by females of all ranks and religions, but lately, to imitate the great chiefs, who secluded their wives, from jealousy, the custom of a harem is being gradually adopted in the towns and by the wealthy. I may add here that, in spite of the prevalence of Christianity, and the abundance of its professing teachers, Mussulmans are not alone in the doctrine of plurality, almost every man keeping as many hand-maidens as his means will permit.”

I proceed now to make such observations on the extracts from the Report of Mr. Plowden as they seem to me to suggest. The singular mountain region they refer to, although situated in tropical Africa, far more resembles in climate and productions a temperate European or Asiatic country, while the races that inhabit it bear a closer relation to Asiatics than to Africans. In mere physical geography, Abyssinia, with the neighbouring country of the Gallas, embracing the extensive territory which reaches from the 8° to the 16° of north latitude and extending from the shore of the Red Sea to the Blue Nile, bears a close resemblance to the plateaux and valleys of the Andes, in which sprang up the civilisation of Mexico and Peru, although of very inferior capacity to these for social progress.

The two most advanced nations inhabiting the plateaux now described are the Abyssinians and the Gallas, who seem to me to be of one cognate race, although speaking different languages. The fullest account of the personal appearance of the proper Abyssinians is given by Mr. Mansfield Parkyns, who travelled in their country as late as 1843. “The Abyssinians,” says he, “are of middle stature, averaging, I should think, five feet seven inches, rather more than less. I have seldom seen natives above six feet, and only one or two who reached six

feet two inches. In colour, some of them are perfectly black, but the majority are brown, or a very light copper or nut colour. The variety of complexion observable in both sexes is, I should think, attributable to the mixture of races, of which the nation is composed. Although in some districts certain colours appear to predominate slightly over others, yet I have never seen any district, and seldom even any family, in which you could find uniformity of colour." . . . "Both men and women are remarkably well-formed, and in general handsome,—often strikingly so. In features and in form the young Abyssinian women are perhaps among the most beautiful of any on the earth." . . . "They have a face nearly European, with a colour, not often dark enough to be disagreeable, but sufficiently so to present too great a contrast with their large black eyes, a defect which I have often noticed in some Asiatics, and even in Southern Europeans."

The Abyssinians, then, are a black people of various shades of darkness. They have prominent features, and the flat nose, thick lips, and woolly hair of the African negro are all absent. In complexion, person, and features, they have been thought to resemble dark Arabs, but it appears to me that they are, although certainly a different race of man, more like to Hindoos. A little work on Abyssinia lately published at Paris by Mons. Lejean, late French Consul at Massowah, has as a frontispiece a photograph of King Theodore, which fairly represents the most usual type of a Hindoo, both as to colour and features.

The Gallas are, at present, much mixed with the Abyssinians within Abyssinia proper, and although differing from them in language and manners, they seem to me to be of the same race of man, just as Mexicans and Peruvians, however widely differing in other respects, are of the same Red race. Mr. Plowden's spirited account of the Gallas is as follows:—

"The Gallas are noble in appearance, more grave and thoughtful than the Abyssinian, eloquent, strong, and generally handsome; with the pride of a nation of warriors, but very courteous and amenable to reason. Their women are not concealed, and mix freely in society; they are often beautiful—almost always graceful; liberal of their smiles and favours to the brave, and scorning the coward. I have heard that those tribes to the southward are more chaste than these Republicans, but I much doubt if they anywhere attach a particular value to the exercise of that virtue. Each Galla takes as many wives as he can afford to keep. Their features when unmixed with other races, are European. They have no religion, but, without being conscious of it, retain some forms of Christianity, as fasting once in the year, observing the feast of the Cross

and other. They perform also some rude pagan rites, and have a superstitious veneration for certain large trees, to which they sacrifice animals. One word serves for God and sky ; and while they believe that a Supreme Being created them and the world, and orders everything according to his will, they have not the least idea of the immortality of the soul, nor any credence of a future state. In the monarchical provinces the faith of Mahomed has made much progress, and the Roman Catholics are making a vigorous effort to plant the religion of Christ amongst those other Gallas who are on their road to Kaffa. As these races have, as yet, no priesthood to blind them, and no strong prejudices to render them deaf, the chances of success are considerable."

Besides the Abyssinians and Gallas, the elevated plateaux with the lowlands of the coast are inhabited by wild tribes differing both in language and manners both from Abyssinians and Gallas, and Mr. Plowden enumerates no fewer than ten. These are frequently nomadic, and consequently also predatory. Of their physical form nothing is said, but the probability is that it will be found on due inquiry to be the same as that of the Abyssinians and Gallas.

Who, then, are the Abyssinians, and the Gallas, and others, if these be of the same cognate race? I have myself no doubt that, when the indispensable inquiry is made, they will be found to be an indigenous race, as much aboriginal to the country as are Chinese to China, Hindus to Hindustan, or Australians to Australia. It would be strange, indeed, if nature which has distributed the races of man so generally over the earth, should have omitted to people a large portion of the eastern side of Africa gifted with a fertile soil and temperate climate. An opinion has, notwithstanding, prevailed that Abyssinia was without inhabitants until peopled by Arabs from the Asiatic coast of the Red Sea. This theory was started by a learned and laborious German scholar of the seventeenth century, who had not himself visited Abyssinia, but who had studied its languages with the help of a native Abyssinian.

Ludolf's hypothesis is founded on the belief, that the languages of Abyssinia are formed in the same manner as the Arabic, and that they contain many Arabic words, while the Abyssinians in person have much likeness to Arabians. The first alleged fact requires a more critical examination than a German scholar of the seventeenth century, without personal experience, could have given to it, and the last allegation is certainly of small value.

The name given to the country and the people by the Arabs has also been adduced in corroboration of the hypothesis of

an Arabian descent. Habsh is the name which the Arabs give to Ethiopia or Abyssinia and also to a native of the country, but they apply the same word indiscriminately to Abyssinian and Negro, and to any part of Southern Africa as well as to Abyssinia. The word Habashat, probably a derivative from it, they apply to Abyssinia, and also to a mixture of nations—indeed, to any promiscuous crowd, a designation which it is easy to believe the Arabs, themselves a single people of one language, would naturally apply to the manifold tribes and nations of the opposite side of the Red Sea, with their many tongues. I have no doubt, however, that the name Abyssinia, adopted by Europeans in modern times, is really nothing else than a corruption of the Arabic word Habsh; but it does not appear how it can support the hypothesis of an Arabian origin of the Abyssinians.

There is no doubt, however, but that the two chief spoken languages of the Abyssinians contain a considerable number of Arabic words much mutilated. In the vocabulary of Salt, which amounts to one hundred and eighty words, I find several,—in all perhaps not fewer than twenty. The examination ought to be of the Geez or dead language, from which the current tongues, the Amhara and Teegré, are said to be derived. I have not had, as yet, an opportunity of examining the dictionary and grammar of the Amhara, compiled by Ludolf; and of the Teegré, the Agow, the Galla, and above all the dead Geez, nothing is known. Some admixture of Arabic words could hardly fail to have taken place, when we consider the narrowness of the sea that divides Arabia from Abyssinia, and the enterprising character of the Arabs of Yemen even under the name of Sabeans, and the religious conversions they have effected since the time of Mahomed, extending even to many of the Gallas, so much intermixed with the proper Abyssinians as conquerors. Even the Abyssinians, like other mountaineers, home-keeping and unenterprising, were once tempted to cross the Red Sea and effect conquests in Arabia. This took place in A.D. 522, near a century before the time of Mahomed, and they are said to have retained their conquests for three-score years.

The Abyssinians, notwithstanding their isolation and the singular physical geography of their country, have made a social progress which places them above all the Negro nations, and perhaps on a level with the third and fourth ranks of Asiatic civilisations. They have immemorably domesticated the dog, the hog, the goat, the sheep, the ox, while, if we are to judge by their names, they have received the horse, the ass, and the camel from Arabia. They understand the art of making iron malleable, and the use of bronze, gold, and silver. They fabricate tissues for clothing, and the material is cotton

which they grow themselves, but which most probably they received from the Hindus. Their agriculture is, on the whole, respectable, for they grow cereals, and the chief of these are wheat and barley, those of temperate regions, corresponding with the temperature of their elevated country. To a considerable extent, they understand the indispensable art of irrigation. The coffee plant is an indigenous product of Abyssinia; but in its culture the Abyssinians are far surpassed by the Arabs, of whose country it is an exotic. It does not, indeed, appear that the Abyssinians had cultivated the plant at all, or elicited its virtues, until taught by the Arabs.

In one important department of the arts, architecture, the Abyssinians are not above the level of the Negros. According to the statement of Mr. Plowden, and there is no reason to discredit it, the Abyssinians, down to the arrival among them of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, were ignorant of the manufacture of bricks and of the art of making mortar, and the few permanent buildings which now exist were constructed by Portuguese architects, before the expulsion of the Jesuits. These fathers must have exercised even more than their wonted activity, for they arrived in the country only in 1625, and were expelled in 1634; so that their whole stay extended to no more than nine years.

The celebrated ruins of Axum, in the territory of Teegré, might be adduced as an objection to the sentence of rudeness pronounced against Abyssinian architecture; but Axum was unquestionably the work of foreign artists. The ruins consist of blocks of hewn stone and of prostrate obelisks. One obelisk, however, still stands, and consists of a single block of granite sixty-five feet high, and, according to Salt, equal in beauty and workmanship to any obelisk of Egypt, and of the same pattern as the similar monuments of that country, only wanting the hieroglyphics. One stone had a Greek inscription on one face and an Ethiopian, probably a translation of it, on another. The Greek inscription has been translated by Mr. Salt, an early and accomplished traveller of the first years of the present century. According to it, the party who commanded the inscription is named Aezanas, which may be pronounced an Ethiopian, since it is not a Greek word, and he calls himself the "Son of the God, the invincible Mars," adding, "In grateful remembrance of him who begot me, the invincible Mars, I have dedicated to him a golden statue and one of silver and three of bronze." The stone containing the inscriptions most probably formed part of the temple which contained these statues, and descent from Mars simply signifies that the king or chieftain in question wished to be thought a warrior. This is at least more rea-

sonable than King Theodore's claim to be a lineal descendant of Solomon and David, which would make him a Jew, a race contemned in Abyssinia under the designation of Falachas.

The conclusion to be drawn from the evidence afforded by the monuments of Axum is obvious enough. The architects and head artificers must have been Egyptians when the Greeks ruled Egypt, and before the Egyptians had embraced Christianity. As this last event had not generally taken place until the close of the second century, it is certain that the monuments of Axum cannot be less than sixteen hundred years old, and may be by some centuries older.

But, it may be asked, how came Egyptian monuments under the Greek rule of Egypt to have been constructed in a country so rude, remote, and isolated as Ethiopia must, in my view, have always been? The explanation is, I think, not difficult, and in other parts of the world we have parallel cases in illustration. A native prince of Abyssinia, whose principality lay in the extensive and fertile plateaux of Axum, may by good fortune, and possibly by better administration than usual, have attained some power, wealth, and population, and travelling Greeks from Egypt would instruct him in the Egyptian manner of raising monuments to his fame. The liberality of such a prince would invite architects and masons from the neighbouring country of Egypt, and on the death of himself, or the fall of his dynasty, the monuments would be left to neglect and ruin, that is, in the condition they now are, and most likely have been for many ages.

Several countries of the East afford examples of such a procedure. The finest monuments of Ceylon were built, not by the slothful natives of the island, but by Hindus from the continent. It was the same with the ancient and best monuments of the country of the Burmese, which are all ancient, and in taste, execution, and material, greatly surpassing those constructed in modern times by native artists. It is the same with the remarkable and extensive remains which have been of late years discovered in the very forests of Cambodia, which the present inhabitants are totally incapable of making, and which, indeed, they consider to have been the work of supernatural beings, as, indeed, do the Abyssinians in regard to the monuments of Axum.

But the most remarkable illustration is afforded by the ancient temples of Java. That fertile and fine island had never existed as one sovereignty; but in several of its wide valleys, princes of considerable power had arisen, and under their auspices the Hindu religion had been introduced, and monuments to it had been erected equalling, if not surpassing,

those of Southern India in beauty, and often in extent. These consist chiefly of temples erected between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, and were evidently built by Hindu artists, the natives of the country furnishing nothing but labour. As soon as the Hindus withdrew, the natives, as long as they continued in the religion of the Hindus, erected only grotesque and ugly imitations of Hindu architecture, and ever since they adopted the Mohamedan religion, they have erected no durable structure of masonry whatever; for a Javanese mosque, a rough wooden structure, is little better than an Abyssinian church, which is built of rough unhewn stone without mortar.

In one matter, at least, the Abyssinians give an evidence of civilisation which no Negro people has ever given. They are in possession of the art of writing; and to judge by the form of the letters and their sequence, its invention would appear to be their own. The alphabet consists of thirty-three consonants, and is, like other Oriental writing, syllabic, the vowels being represented by diacritic marks. If the Ethiopic was cotemporary with the Greek inscription on the stone at Axum already referred to, it would follow that the Abyssinians were in possession of the art of writing some sixteen centuries ago, and, therefore, long before Angles and Saxons were so. According to the authentic statement of Mr. Plowden, the Abyssinians make very little use of it, but such has, no doubt, been the case with all rude people. It seems to be for the most part in the hands of the priesthood, and to have enabled them to preserve an ancient language called the Geed, which to the Abyssinians is what Sanskrit is to the Hindus, Pali to the Buddhists, Send to the Gebres, and what Slavic once was to the Javanese. The only remarkable work in it is a translation of the Bible, which is to the Abyssinians what the Vedas are to the Hindus and the Zendavesta to the worshippers of fire, being, like these, withheld from the laity, with the exception of "the Psalms," and these only to be gabbled without being understood.

Christianity is asserted to have been introduced into Abyssinia A.D. 331, the first bishop being Frumentius, an Egyptian, ordained by no less a person than St. Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria. The practice of appointing a Copt to the archbishopric of Abyssinia has ever since continued, and he is obtained by a requisition and a handsome *douceur*. This is the Aboona. Thus the first bishop of Abyssinia is nearly cotemporary with the first bishop of Rome avowed by the State. The manner of his appointment bears some resemblance to that of the chief of the Catholic Church, and also to that of the Delai Lama, or head of the Buddhist religion of Tibet.

The Abyssinians are Coptic Christians, and have been longer Christians than most of the nations of Europe; and whether their Christianity be right or wrong, they are content with it and intolerant of any other form, while they have a powerful priesthood deeply interested in its maintenance. The Jesuits of Portugal were, after conferring substantial benefits on the Abyssinians in the arts, expelled for attempting their conversion to Catholicism, and French, Catholic, English, and German missionaries, denouncing each others' doctrines, are now commanded to be silent on religious questions, and confine themselves to preaching morality. The Abyssinians, in fact, seem to be as impatient of foreign theological interference as Hindus, Mahomedans, Buddhists, and Japanese, and it will be time enough to imbue them with sounder Christian doctrines when by a higher social advancement they come to have the capacity to understand them. In the meantime they are bigoted and contented barbarians. There is practical sense in the words ascribed to King Theodore, "What I want are physicians, surgeons, engineers, and artizans, and not missionaries of religion." The Protestant missionaries have been prohibited from distributing the Scriptures in the vernacular languages, and in the way of conversion the utmost that has been conceded to them is to try their hand in the conversion of the obdurate Jews, known in Abyssinia under the name of Falachas, and to that of certain heathen Galla prisoners of war, *experimenta in corpore vili*.

A country so backward in civilisation, and consequently in skill and industry, as Abyssinia, while, at the same time, it yielded no peculiar products in demand by foreign nations, afforded no field for external commerce. Coffee, indeed, is the peculiar product of Abyssinia, but it was not the Abyssinians, but the Arabs of the opposite shore of the Red Sea, who elicited its virtues and first cultivated it. The ivory of slaughtered elephants, and the bodies of captured or kidnapped men, women, and children, seem always to have been the staple exports of Abyssinia. At present it is a land-locked country, blockaded to the east by Turkish territory, to the west by Egyptian, to the south by the hereditarily hostile Gallas, and to the north by the barbarous Shangalla Negros.

Even rivers, which in other parts of the world are main promoters of intercourse and civilisation, are, in Abyssinia, all turbulent unnavigable streams. The main ones all fall into the Blue Nile, called by the Abyssinians the Abai, which is itself, as long as it is in Abyssinian territory, turbulent and inaccessible to navigation. Yet this is the stream, worthless to Abyssinia, which, by carrying the rich drainage of their

country to distant Egypt, is the true cause of the fertility of the latter country, and in so far as this fertility is concerned, it is, in fact, the true Nile. Johnson, in his *Rasselas*, fancying it the only tributary of the Nile, and in language too metaphorical for accuracy, while he ascribes its source to Abyssinia, calls it "the father of waters, whose bounty pours down the streams of plenty and scatters the harvests of Egypt over half the world."

There is a tradition, and perhaps it is little better, that Ethiopia or Abyssinia once existed as a great and powerful empire. It is difficult to believe that so extensive a region, by its very physical aspect unfavourable to union,—which does not contain a single relic of ancient native art, and the inhabitants of which are now, and always must have been, greatly divided by lingual, tribal, and social differences, could ever have been united under a single administration of any durability.

When the Portuguese were in the country in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, there existed a chief of considerable power, their celebrated and almost fabulous Prester John; and there reigned at the same time four kings, nearly independent of him, and his own power was subverted even while the Portuguese were in Abyssinia. When Bruce visited Abyssinia almost one hundred years ago, the country was in anarchy and civil war, and it is so at the present day. During his two years residence, the most important prince was the party called by Europeans an Emperor, but known to Abyssinians as the Athie or Negus, whose capital was Gondor, in Amaraha, or the south-western division of the kingdom. Soon after the traveller's departure, the so-called Emperor was superseded by a chief of Teegré, on the north-eastern division of the kingdom, who became a kind of Mayor of the palace, or Mahratta Peshwa, and ever since, the Emperor has been a phantom, the country having been ruled with none less extent of authority by a succession of chieftains superseding one another. These are the parties known in accounts of Abyssinia under the name of Ras, which, in the languages of the country, literally signifies "the head," and metaphorically head-man or chieftain.

King Theodore is one of these adventurers, and the story of his career is a good example of the normal state of government in Abyssinia. His friend and favourite, Mr. Plowden, gives the following, and I have no doubt, authentic account of it:—

"A chief named Kasai, having great family influence in the provinces bordering on Sennaar, forced his way by the sword into some notoriety, and married the daughter of the Ras Ali (the 'Mayor of the Palace at Gondor'). Of a proud and im-

patient spirit, after alternate rebellion and submission, and having defeated in numerous battles all the troops that were sent against him, he at last threw off all mask, and openly defied the Ras Ali and his adherents. Having in some measure disciplined his troops, for the first time in this country, by the assistance of a few Turkish soldiers, he suddenly appeared, after extraordinary forced marches, in the neighbourhood of the Ras's blockading camp, and fairly challenged him to the combat on the plains of Godjam, favourable as they are for cavalry, the Ras's pride. A pitched battle took place, in which the Ras was completely defeated, and barely escaped, hotly pursued by his adversary. In a second battle he was entirely driven from the territories conquered by Gooksa (a former 'Mayor of the Palace'), and forced to take refuge in his natal province of Edjo. Dejjaj Oobeay (Dejjaj is a title equivalent to governor) in the north, had not even gained time to collect his troops when Kasai threatened him with his whole force, and obliged him to fly to his hill-fort in great fear. The victory, however, obtained by Kasai over the Ras had set free the daring chieftain Birro, son of Gosho, from his mountain; and the latter, to add to the complication, enemy as he was of the Ras, had a still more deadly feud with Kasai, on account of his father's death, slain in battle by the latter. Kasai, therefore, patched up a temporary peace with Oobeay, and hurried to meet this formidable rival; since when all parties have feared to enter into decisive conflict. A chief of the Teegray dynasty, Balgud Areya, had taken advantage of the confusion to raise the standard of revolt against Oobeay, but the return of this latter has, for the present, repressed any serious disturbances. Affairs now stand in a singular position: the Ras Ali has returned to Devra Tabor, but without any power beyond the range of his foragers. Dejjaj Kasai and Dejjaj Birro threaten each other in Godjam, with large armies, not having yet dared the encounter; and Dejjaj Oobeay has re-occupied Teegray, after having seen by how feeble a grasp he holds his power. Numerous other chiefs have all their faculties on the alert to seize any chance that may offer; and it is difficult to say in whose hands the reins of power may finally remain. In the meantime it is certain that the roads are unsafe, commerce checked, justice paralysed, and diplomatic relations impossible; and it would be idle to hope that the anarchy consequent on these events will soon cease."

It appears that Kasai, or, to give his name in full, Kasai Karanya, was born in 1818, and that he commenced his career in 1848, when he was, consequently, thirty years of age. Down to 1854, the date of Mr. Plowden's report, he

seems not to have taken the higher title of Ras, but contented himself with that of Dejjaj, or governor. It is since the death of his guide, Mr. Plowden, that he has taken the title of Athie, or emperor. In his letter to Her Majesty, his claims to the empire of Ethiopia as the lineal descendant of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are insisted on, for it thus begins, "My fathers the Emperors having forgotten the Creator, he handed over their kingdom to the Gallas and the Turks, but God created me—lifted me out of the dust, and restored the Empire to my rule. He endowed me with power, and enabled me to stand in the place of my fathers. By his power I drove away the Gallas. But for the Turks, I have told them to leave the land of my ancestors. They refuse."

The character of Theodore seems to have been well drawn by Mr. Plowden, for this is the account of him:—

"Dejjaj Kasai is vigorous and subtle, daring to a fault, and, perhaps, more disposed to innovation than any. He has abolished in his army the practice of mutilating dead bodies; taught his soldiers some discipline, makes war without baggage or camp-followers, and encourages foreigners. Though proud, his manner is all humility; he is severe, liberal, and usually just, but breaks out now and then into unaccountable acts of violence, which indicate a somewhat unsettled temperament; he commences enterprises with more vigour than he pursues them, and is much under the influence of prophets and fortune-tellers."

Upon the whole, then, I think we must come to the conclusion that, although the Abyssinians are very old Christians, they are but very indifferent ones, and that in civilisation and morals they rank below most of the nations professing Mahomedanism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.
